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JAMES MONROE TAYLOR *

Written, as one feels on every page, from the depths of a great and affectionate admiration, fully deserved, this biography is yet heavy. Toward the end of the book the biographer (Professor of Latin at Vassar College) refers to the life of Leslie Stephen by Maitland. The reviewer recalls a passage in the preface of this same life of Leslie Stephen where Maitland says: "Were what we have done for others the measure of what should be done for us, then the life of Leslie Stephen, if written at all, should be well written. Moreover, I think that had he been an impartial judge in his own cause, he would have admitted that an interesting book might be made about him."

After reading the present biography one feels compelled to apply the conclusions of Mr. Maitland to the case of Doctor Taylor—that what Doctor Taylor had done for others should have gained for him a good biography, and also, that it could have been, and therefore should have been, an interesting book; interesting not only to those who had known Doctor Taylor intimately, or were members of his family, but to all educators, and to the public at large.

It seems a pity that modern biographers, as a rule, because of the belief that a scientific research into heredity and environment is necessary, begin with the ancestry, the babyhood, the school-days, the sophomoric youth, of the hero, instead of opening with some striking act or scene of later date when the hero has become really interesting, and then, if necessary, going back to the milk-bottle, the perambulator, the capable house-keeping grandmother, and the grandfather who liked, and who would have, a good horse. In the life of Doctor Taylor all that was necessary as to his heredity and environment could have been given in a paragraph. He came of a Baptist family, his father having been a Baptist minister; was born in Brooklyn,

* *The Life and Letters of James Monroe Taylor*, President of Vassar College, 1886 to 1914. By Elizabeth Hazelton Haight. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.

New York; was educated in Essex, Connecticut, and in Rochester, New York; later studying for the ministry in the Rochester Theological Seminary. All this, very much drawn out, covers the early career of Doctor Taylor, while the first thing concerning him that is at all interesting to the general public is not reached until the seventy-third large page of a large book,—his theological doubts, when after his graduation he was sent abroad.

The writer does not say so, but the reader almost unconsciously draws the conclusion that, going into the countries of historic churches where the teachings and liturgies are the flower and fruit of centuries, Doctor Taylor became dissatisfied with his own theological training, so much so that he almost gave up the Baptist ministry. He did not do so, however, and the reader's feeling is strong that it was filial love that kept him to his purpose, and that all through his life there was an unspoken, unallowed regret as to this "course for which training had prepared him." He writes to a friend: "I have been on the point of giving up all—and going into business." Standing by his too early decision, however, he spends, after returning from Europe, four months in writing sermons, and as a 'candidate', preaching from place to place, until in 1872 he is called to South Norwalk, Connecticut, to the Baptist Tabernacle, and ten years thereafter to the Fourth Baptist church at Providence, Rhode Island. In 1886 he became connected with Vassar College, where one feels that he found, perhaps, the only congenial life possible to him after his early training—the life of a teacher combined with that of a preacher, yet free from the parochial programme which would demand a hard and fast creed.

The position at Vassar was one of the most exacting, and because of the criticism and argument as to the good and evil of the higher education of women, it was a position of the greatest responsibility. But Doctor Taylor seems to have had great tact and some humor, a combination that must have made him wiser than Solomon, for though he had to deal with many more women than had Solomon, he did not seem to become sentimental in any direction. To go back to heredity—he must have had the "horse-sense" of his grandfather.

Fortunately for Vassar, he was scholarly after the older fashion, instead of pedagogic after the Prussian pattern, and with high and broad ideals of life and education. It is of Doctor Taylor as an educator, strictly, that this biography should have been written. His example, his teaching, his ideals are still needed.

To quote: "Three themes, all growing out of his conception of the great teacher, seem to dominate his message,—the teaching of morals in all education; the proper place of pedagogy in the teacher's equipment; and the right of women to a liberal education." In selecting teachers he insisted on the fullest knowledge possible of the "details of their personality, their personal influence, as well as of their scholarship and teaching ability." "Education should seek to bring its subjects to the perfection of their moral, intellectual, and physical nature in order that they might be of the greatest possible use to themselves and to others."

Speaking of great teachers, he said—"It was their personality, it was the power of a heart and a soul that believe in truth and believe in communicating that truth . . . to the hearts of other men. It was not because Arnold was a great master of Latin that he accomplished what he did at Rugby, it was because Arnold got into the hearts of the boys before him that he made them the greatest in Church and State in England. Every one of us feels the impulse of some life that has influenced us . . . and has made us feel the power of its vision and the power of its own truth. Unless lives have that, whatever may be their intellectual attainment, they must fail as teachers. No teacher can be great without this, and no teacher can fail to communicate part of this to the souls of those to whom he speaks. No advanced course can take the place of it, and *no pedagogical training, however thorough, can stand instead of it in that great work which it is our highest privilege to be engaged in,—the teaching of the young how to live.*"

In an address on "The Place of Pedagogy in the Training of the Teacher", "Doctor Taylor takes issue with the formalism that makes the science of teaching more essential than knowledge and than spirit. Not belittling the well-balanced study of the science and history of teaching, he would show their true place in the teacher's equipment."

Doctor Taylor denounces Stanley Hall's reactionary educational theorem that sex must largely determine the character of education. He says: "His constructive scheme is intended to guard against the 'excessive mentality' which he regards as a danger, but which, it may be suggested, is not a common danger in men and women of the college age, if at any age whatever. . . . It may indeed be said for women as well as for all other students, that the assumption that she has a special mission and that the teacher knows what it is, is the pedagogue's fallacy underlying very much unsound training in our day. Early education needs to be for life and not for any specific work, the training of the whole individual, cosmopolitan rather than provincial, for wealth of life more than depth of learning."

In 1900, speaking of the New World brought to us through discoveries and inventions, he says: "For this New World there is a need, as ever, of the old Gospel of the reality of man's spiritual life. . . . This old Gospel must convey to the New World, in terms fitting new conditions and knowledge, its eternal message—'the conviction of the reality, power and necessity of the Spiritual Life'." He held that "the missionary spirit was essential to the teacher."

In a short correspondence between Doctor Taylor and his Professor of Biology in 1902, the question raised was how to account for the higher qualities of humanity by scientific theories of evolution, the struggle for life, or nutrition. Apparently the biologist did not answer, and the biographer says no more. It seems that Doctor Taylor might have found somewhat of an answer in Drummond's *Ascent of Man* (published in this country in 1900), whose explanation is that there are always two struggles going on—the struggle for life or nutrition; and the struggle for the life of others, or reproduction, which last struggle contains, says Mr. Drummond, "the germ of all spiritual life—to-day called 'Altruism'."

Besides being president of the college, Doctor Taylor held always the chair of Ethics, and along with these two positions "he had a share in every part of the business management of the college, as well as in the work of raising educational endowment and emergency funds. On this last point he said: "Per-

mit me to conclude [his report] with the statement of my deep conviction that the employment of the president of the college in this kind of labor does not commend itself to my experience or to my judgment. . . . I think that the office of college president has been distinctly lowered in the estimation of our business men by this constant resort to Wall Street in the pursuit of college funds. Times have changed. The spirit of the rich men, beset and wearied by innumerable demands, has grown less patient of the importunity of the college president . . . and the attitude of most has become defensive (when not offensive). The college should recognize these changed conditions and make its always necessary appeals through indirect approach, or after securing the interest and intelligent appreciation of those whose help it seeks."

In December, 1899, Doctor Taylor was called as president to Brown University. He asked for time to consider, and his letter declining was dated March 1st. "It has seemed to me", he writes, "that there are more men willing to give their best service to the education of men than there are to give a like earnest service to woman's education. I have been convinced, also, that the position offered me would present no greater opportunity for usefulness than that I now hold. The chance of directly influencing the life of one's time, through the young men of a great college, is alluring, but indirectly, and in an increasing degree directly, the influence of the educated woman in the home, the school, the Church, the State and Society, can hardly be accounted as holding the second place." Again he refers to "the danger of casting a reflection on a work which I believe to be of equal worth with the worthiest." These were of chief considerations that held him to Vassar.

It was not until February, 1913, that Doctor Taylor sent in his resignation, to take effect the following February, unless arrangements could be made sooner. "By the first week in March I shall have had forty years of public service. All of it has been arduous,—thirteen years in two pastorates,—twenty-seven years in my present position. I need not tell you that these college years have involved incessant strain, and exacting and exhausting care. Besides the responsibility involved

in the transition from a small college to a large one,—business, financial, educational, administrative, social,—I have had charge of the religious interests and have held a professorship from the beginning until now. The demands upon us from without, I need not tell you, have grown steadily with the years. May I not be excused for shrinking from the extension or continuance of the responsibility?"

He ends his letter of resignation: "I accepted your invitation to become president on the 21st of April, 1886. I made no promises and no prophecies beyond my simple pledge to give to this work all the powers I possessed. I have endeavored to fulfill that pledge and I return to you the trust with every hope that you may secure a successor worthy of your coöperation in advancing the interests of Vassar College."

In December, 1916, two years after his resignation, Doctor Taylor died. To quote his biographer: "In the ordinary light of everyday association he had stood forth a great man."

S. B. E.